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Annual overview report of the Administrative Committee on Coordination for 1997

Summary

The present report provides an overview of coordination issues addressed by the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) in 1997, which are being brought to the attention of intergovernmental bodies.

Part one of the report highlights the issue of reform, which was a major feature of the experience of many organizations of the United Nations system during the year and which has had significant implications for the work of ACC. The actions taken by ACC to promote the coordinated follow-up to major global conferences by the United Nations system, including an assessment of the work of the three task forces set up for that purpose, as well as the inter-agency work undertaken in relation to the special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21, are also covered in part one. A number of other issues on which there was significant collaborating among the organizations of the United Nations system are also addressed.

Part two contains a brief outline of the programme of work of ACC for 1998.

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Introduction

1. 1997 has been a year of transition and reform for many organizations of the United Nations system. The assumption of office by the present Secretary-General at the beginning of the year brought new leadership to the Administrative Committee on Coordination. Also during the year, new Executive Heads were elected in five United Nations agencies and organizations, namely, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the World Intellectual Property Organization, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, the International Atomic Energy Agency and the United Nations International Drug Control Programme.

2. Reform continued to be a major feature of the experience of many organizations. At the United Nations, the reform process initiated by the Secretary-General involved two phases. The first phase (track I), in March, identified initial measures that could be carried out within the Secretary-General's own authority. A more comprehensive package of reforms (track II) was then issued in July. These reform measures, as acted on by the General Assembly (resolutions 52/12 A and B), are already reshaping, in a major way, the manner in which business is carried out within the Organization and the way the United Nations relates to the rest of the system.

3. The reforms that the United Nations is undergoing, together with reform processes under way in the organizations of the system, have significant implications for the work of ACC, which, in turn, is undertaking a renewed effort to bring about increased collaboration and greater unity of purpose and coherence of action within the system, thus enabling it to be a more effective instrument for addressing and responding to the challenges arising from the rapidly changing global environment.

4. These developments and their implications for the system as a whole are dealt with in part one of the present report. Part one also provides a broad overview of other issues addressed by the Committee during the year: its review of progress achieved in the integrated and coordinated follow-up to global conferences; universal access to basic communications and information services; preparations for and follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21; inter-agency preparations for the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the five-year review of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action; the relationship of the United Nations system with civil society; peace-building in crisis situations; and progress in the implementation of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa.

5. In addition, part one of the report covers inter-agency preparations for the forthcoming triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, and updates information on measures undertaken by the system to assist countries invoking article 50 of the Charter of the United Nations. It also covers the follow-up to the Graça Machel study on the impact of armed conflict on children and the response of the United Nations system to the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

6. With respect to administrative questions, part one covers the actions taken by ACC to promote the safety and security of United Nations system staff in the field, and its recommendations relating to the conditions of service in the United Nations system.

7. Part two of the report provides a brief outline of the main areas of the programme of work of the Committee for 1998.

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8. In a statement to the Economic and Social Council on 6 February 1998, the Secretary-General provided an overview of the work of ACC during 1997 and his assessment of the evolving role of ACC and of relationships with the Economic and Social Council. That statement could be viewed as a foreword by the Secretary-General to the present report. Relevant excerpts are reproduced in annex I below.

Part one. Coordination issues addressed by ACC in 1997 brought to the attention of intergovernmental bodies

I. Reform and strengthening of the United Nations system

9. During 1997, the Secretary-General undertook a major initiative to reconfigure the Organization to enable it to meet more effectively the growing challenges and demands being placed on it and to prepare it for the twenty-first century. A key component of this process was the putting in place of new leadership and management structures for the Organization as a whole, including its programmes and funds, thus enhancing its contribution to the overall effort to promote greater unity of purpose within the wider United Nations system. This initiative provided the framework within which ACC pursued during the year its consideration of issues relating to the strengthening and reform of the United Nations system, guided by the joint statement on reform, adopted by ACC in November 1996 (E/1997/54, annex I).

10. Special attention was given by ACC to the implications for the system of the establishment within the United Nations itself, at the secretariat level, of Executive Committees in the four core areas of peace and security, economic and social affairs, development cooperation, and humanitarian affairs, with human rights being approached as a fifth core area, as well as a cross-cutting issue. This was viewed as an important contribution to the coherence of action of the system as a whole. Another important measure from this point of view was the consolidation of the economic and social functions of the Secretariat in a single department, which took place in parallel with the consolidation of technical secretariat servicing facilities for United Nations intergovernmental bodies. Other relevant measures included the reorientation of public information activities, the streamlining and consolidation of United Nations administrative, financial, personnel, procurement and other services and reductions in the level of documentation, accompanied by a reduction in the Organization's overall budget and staffing levels.

11. The second phase of United Nations reform addressed an even wider range of issues, many of which required intergovernmental action and were embodied in a comprehensive report of the Secretary-General entitled "Renewing the United Nations: a programme for reform" (A/51/950 and Add. 1-7), which led to the adoption by the Assembly of resolutions 52/12 A and B. ACC noted with appreciation that, in formulating a reform programme for the United Nations itself, the Secretary-General had been guided by a clear concept of the role of the Organization within the broader United Nations system, and had approached the future of the Organization within a larger vision of the future of the system as a whole.

12. Other organizations within the system have also continued to pursue far-reaching reforms, which are bringing about the reorientation of programmes, increased efficiency in operations, and significant changes and improvements in their functioning.

13. In reviewing these processes, ACC considered that a new phase of system-wide reform was under way and that these processes were having an increasingly significant impact on

the overall relevance of the system and its responsiveness to changing international requirements, as well as on the image of the system as a whole. ACC recognized the importance of sharing plans and information on these processes on a continuing basis. The objective, at the managerial and strategic level, is to ensure that such processes are mutually supportive, that implications for other organizations are identified and taken into account, and that best practices are institutionalized and drawn upon system-wide. This objective is especially crucial in relation to actions under way to review mission statements and reorient policies and programme priorities.

14. ACC agreed that approaches to inter-agency coordination and cooperation should be based on a renewed effort to elaborate common policy objectives and pursue all opportunities for programme cooperation, and on the effective pooling of capabilities and resources throughout the system, at both the headquarters and field levels. A new and more comprehensive approach to the concept of security, fully encompassing its economic and social components, should underlie that effort. Within that concept, a clear sense of the contribution and capacities of each organization should be established as the basis for further rationalizing the division of labour within the system and enhancing its overall impact.

15. Other cross-organizational issues identified by ACC as requiring common attention in pursuing these reform processes included the issue of linkages with civil society, and the sharing of experience at the inter-agency level on cooperation with the private sector; managerial improvements within the United Nations common system, in particular in relation to existing rigidities in personnel policies and practices; and the need to ensure that new programmes are matched by adequate resources.

16. As part of the effort to improve the exchange and dissemination of information system-wide, a publication will be issued under the aegis of ACC in 1998 outlining common themes underlying the reform processes under way in the system.

II. Integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up to international conferences and summits

A. The inter-agency task forces

17. Over the past two years, ACC has sought to develop a coordinated approach to the follow-up to global conferences held during the 1990s,[1] with a view to promoting sustained and integrated implementation, at the country level, of the policy recommendations emanating from these conferences. To this end, and drawing on the experience of the inter-agency task force set up for the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, three thematic ad hoc task forces

[1] The World Summit for Children (1990), the World Conference on Education for All (1990), the Second United Nations Conference on the Least Developed Countries (1990), the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (1992), the International Conference on Nutrition (1992), the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (1994), the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction (1994), the World Summit for Social Development (1995), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995), the resumed fiftieth session of the General Assembly to consider public administration and development (1996), the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (1996), the World Food Summit (1996) and the ninth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (1996).

were established by ACC in October 1995.[2] In addition, the Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality was established by ACC in 1996 with the objective of addressing all aspects of the implementation of the Platform for Action adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women, as well as gender-related recommendations emanating from other international conferences.

18. With regard to human rights, ACC has paid particular attention since 1994 to the system-wide follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. In line with the provisions of that Programme, it has provided guidance and identified steps to promote the incorporation of human rights into all relevant strategies and programmes, including those at the country level, and has called for close collaboration between the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the organizations of the system. To this end, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights organized during the year inter-agency consultations focusing on the preparations for the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration on Human Rights and the five-year review of the implementation of the Vienna Programme of Action in 1998 (see paras. 40 and 41 below), and is actively participating in the Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions (CCPOQ). As cross-cutting issues, human rights concerns were integrated in the work of all three ACC inter-agency task forces.

19. Regarding arrangements for the follow-up to the World Food Summit, ACC has endorsed specific networking arrangements on rural development and food security (which replace the former ACC Subcommittee on Rural Development), with a view to ensuring maximum cost-effectiveness, country-level focus, flexibility and efficiency. The network consists of a two-tiered, informal coordination mechanism that is composed, at the country level, of thematic groups for rural development and food security within the resident coordinator system and, at the headquarters level, a network of interested organizations, including non-United Nations actors, in particular civil society organizations, to backstop these country-level groups and promote common approaches. Similar approaches are being developed with regard to the follow-up to the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II).

20. ACC has also reiterated the importance of inter-agency collaboration in the follow-up to the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction and the implementation of the Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action.

21. Upon the completion of their assigned tasks, the task forces, as ad hoc, time-bound mechanisms, were discontinued and their work has been assessed by ACC. In undertaking that review, ACC sought to ensure that the work of the task forces would be actively followed up at the country level, as well as within the ACC machinery, and also to maximize the support it would provide to the Economic and Social Council's review, at a session in May 1998, of the integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of global conferences and summits.

22. The inter-agency work pursued by ACC through the task forces has constituted an unprecedented system-wide effort in providing integrated, coordinated and productive support to Governments in the follow-up to the global agenda derived from recent global conferences. In developing an effective framework for promoting integrated follow-up action, the task forces have used a number of innovative methods in their work, such as the

[2] The Inter-Agency Task Force on Basic Social Services for All, chaired by the United Nations Population Fund; the Inter-Agency Task Force on Full Employment and Sustainable Livelihoods, chaired by the International Labour Organization; and the Inter-Agency Task Force on an Enabling Environment for Social and Economic Development, chaired by the World Bank.

designation of lead agencies, the use of country reviews, the elaboration of information materials and guidance notes, the identification of best practices for dissemination at the country level, and the organization of country seminars. As such, they have proved to be efficient instruments for improving the interaction between inter-agency efforts at the headquarters level and coordination at the country level.

23. The effectiveness of the work of the task forces will ultimately be measured by the extent to which the system is able to pursue and step up collaborative activities and enhance its impact in assisting countries to implement in a sustained and comprehensive way the policy commitments made at these global conferences. The contribution made by the task forces in this regard goes beyond the specific outputs they have generated.

24. The strong sense of commitment and cooperation developed among the organizations of the United Nations system participating in the task forces has led to a greater awareness of the need for continued dialogue among the United Nations agencies concerned, as well as between the organizations of the United Nations system and national Governments, in order to achieve the objectives of the conferences. The recommendations made by the task forces for future action as well as the lessons learned from their experience provide a solid basis for continued efforts to mobilize United Nations system support for the coordinated follow-up to conferences.

25. The Bretton Woods institutions were key participants in the work of the task forces. They contributed actively to the development of common approaches to translating the normative recommendations of conferences into operational guidance, with a focusing on the country level. Their participation in this process also contributed to achieving a better overall understanding between these institutions and other organizations of the United Nations system of the requirements for supporting effectively the development agenda at the country level.

26. ACC agreed that the effort to promote integrated and coordinated follow-up to United Nations conferences should be actively pursued and approached in the broader context of United Nations system reform and of the system's effort to enhance its capacity to advance the global agenda in a coherent and effective way. In the same context, ACC emphasized the important role of civil society in furthering the objectives of conferences at the national and international levels and the need for the organizations of the United Nations system to draw fully on the strengths, advocacy role and resources of civil society.

27. In the immediate future, the challenge for each organization, as well as the system as a whole, will be to maintain, in cooperation with Governments, the momentum created by the work of the task forces with a view to providing sustained support to countries, including through the resident coordinator system, in translating conference outcomes into concrete national policies and programmes. In this context, ACC reiterated that sustainable development provides a broad framework to guide the ongoing work of the system, and underlined the importance of mainstreaming human rights, environmental, gender, population and children-related questions, and of making optimum use of information and communication technologies. The Committee also stressed that the goal of poverty eradication, as reaffirmed by all the recent global conferences, remains a fundamental commitment of the system.

28. ACC called upon the organizations of the United Nations system to utilize fully national-level mechanisms and frameworks that are in place or are currently being developed with countries (for example, the country strategy note and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework), including the coordination of these mechanisms and frameworks with individual initiatives of agencies of the United Nations system that are not covered

under such frameworks, to support the development of national strategies and action plans, based on national priorities, for implementing conference outcomes in an integrated manner. In so doing, ACC recommended that maximum advantage should be taken of the results of the work of the three inter-agency task forces, including lessons learned, as well as of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) and Inter-Agency Committee on Women and Gender Equality (IACWGE) in their respective areas of responsibility.

29. Within the ACC machinery itself, CCPOQ, in collaboration with the United Nations Development Group and the United Nations Staff College, organized an inter-agency workshop on field level follow-up to global conferences at the International Training Centre of the International Labour Organization (ILO) at Turin, Italy. The workshop brought together key participants from field offices, the agencies leading the task forces, and substantive secretariats of the Economic and Social Council and the functional commissions responsible for conference follow-up. At the workshop, further guidance was developed for coordinated follow-up to global conferences at the field level, in particular for the resident coordinator system. The workshop identified follow-up actions concerning the strengthening of dialogue among organizations of the United Nations system and with Governments at the country level, the elaboration of common frameworks for United Nations system programmes, mainstreaming of gender issues and human rights, building of alliances with civil society, and improved and more integrated reporting, analytical frameworks, statistics and indicators. The outputs of the workshop, following review by CCPOQ, have been transmitted to the resident coordinators and country representatives of all the organizations of the system.

30. ACC has directed its subsidiary machinery, in particular IACSD, CCPOQ and IACWGE, to adjust their methods of work, building on the experience of the work of the task forces, and to review their work programmes so as to give priority to promoting, particularly at the country level, the effective implementation of the recommendations of the task forces and, in so doing, to develop further collaboration and strengthen dialogue and interaction among them. In the same context, the Committee emphasized the need to reinforce the normative, policy, and programme development work of the system, which can underpin and support implementation of the goals of global conferences.

B. Universal access to basic communication and information services

31. As part of the efforts of ACC to promote coordinated follow-up to United Nations global conferences, an inter-agency project on universal access to basic communication and information services was launched in 1996, with the International Telecommunication Union designated as lead agency. The project was designed to support the work of the inter-agency task forces engaged in the promotion of integrated follow-up to conferences, as well as other system-wide initiatives such as the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa.

32. Following the completion of the inter-agency project on universal access to basic communication and information services, ACC adopted a statement (see annex II below), which formed the basis for a strategic and systematic approach to information and communication technologies and information management among the organizations of the system. The Secretary-General brought the statement to the attention of the General Assembly at its fifty-second session, which took note of it (decision 52/451). Other executive heads of United Nations organizations have submitted, or are in the process of submitting, the ACC statement to their respective governing bodies. This is an area in which support at the intergovernmental level will be extremely valuable in seeking to accelerate

progress, given the significant potential that access by Governments to basic communication and information services can have for meaningful and sustainable development.

33. The organizations of the United Nations system most directly concerned have agreed to collaborate with the International Telecommunication Union in the implementation of pilot projects in the areas identified in the ACC statement, as well as to pursue together work on the emerging concept, highlighted in the statement, of a right to communicate in the context of universal access to basic communication and information services.

C. Preparations for and follow-up to the special session of the General Assembly to review the implementation of Agenda 21

34. At its nineteenth special session, the General Assembly reviewed the progress being achieved in the implementation of Agenda 21 and other commitments made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. ACC transmitted a statement to the special session, in which it stressed that sustainable development provides an over-arching framework for the activities of the United Nations system in the economic, social and environmental fields (see annex III below).

35. With regard to the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Principles of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Assembly concluded that while significant achievements had been made at both the national and international levels, a great deal more remained to be accomplished. The Assembly called for the mobilization of greater political will to expedite progress towards achieving sustainable development worldwide. The adoption by the Assembly of the Programme for the Further Implementation of Agenda 21 (resolution S-19/2) helped advance international agreement on policy directions to be followed to achieve those ends.

36. As regards issues directly linked to inter-agency cooperation, the General Assembly called for better policy coordination at the intergovernmental level, as well as for continued and more concerted efforts to enhance collaboration among the secretariats of the relevant decision-making bodies. The Assembly stressed the need to strengthen IACSD and its system of task managers, with a view to further enhancing system-wide intersectoral cooperation and coordination for the implementation of Agenda 21 and contributing to the promotion of coordinated follow-up to the major United Nations conferences in the area of sustainable development.

37. Furthermore, the Assembly underscored that all organizations and programmes of the United Nations system, within their respective areas of expertise and mandates, should strengthen, individually and jointly, their support for national efforts to implement Agenda 21 and make these efforts and actions consistent with national plans, policies and priorities of member States.

38. A main challenge ahead for the ACC subsidiary machinery, particularly IACSD and its task manager system, will be to orient inter-agency collaboration so as to ensure a stronger focus on practical implementation, particularly at the country level, of Agenda 21. This renewed effort should take fully into account the outcome of the special session of the General Assembly and be based on common strategic approaches in all key areas of sustainable development. Current initiatives for the further implementation of Agenda 21, such as the preparation of sustainable development guidelines and the organization of sustainable development workshops, are grounded in such system-wide approaches and should, at the same time, contribute to their enrichment.

39. ACC, through its Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, remains fully committed to strengthening inter-agency collaboration in the area of sustainable development, and to supporting efforts for the implementation of Agenda 21 and the Programme adopted at the nineteenth special session of the General Assembly, in 1997.

D. Preparations for the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the five-year review of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action

40. During 1997, ACC undertook special preparations for commemorating in 1998 two important events: the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the five-year review of the implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights reviewed with ACC the steps being undertaken to strengthen linkages between human rights issues and other relevant programmes of the organizations of the system, and to stimulate and coordinate activities related to human rights throughout the system. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights is working closely with other organizations to promote a sense of shared values and help broaden and develop further a rights-based approach to addressing economic, social and humanitarian problems, particularly with respect to children, women and refugees.

41. Intensive inter-agency consultations were held in 1997 to prepare a coordinated plan for the five-year review of the Vienna Conference and the observance of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. ACC welcomed the growing interest of all partners in the international community – Governments, academic institutions and other components of civil society – to sponsor or contribute to relevant activities at the national and international levels. Specific programmes, publications and other activities by the organizations of the system, with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights continuing to facilitate inter-agency cooperation, were reviewed and actively promoted. ACC expects these activities to contribute to the overall effort to include human rights as a key and integral component of the coordinated follow-up to global conferences at the country, regional and global levels.

III. Relations between organizations of the United Nations system and civil society, including the private sector

42. Recognizing the increasingly important role played by non-State actors in advancing the global development agenda, and the need to develop effective partnerships with such actors, ACC gave special attention, during 1997, to the relationships between the United Nations system and civil society, including the private sector. These relationships are a central concern in the reform effort, and an important dimension of many of the policy issues with which the system is confronted, ranging from the adaptation of the system to the changes that are taking place in the national and international environment, to resource flows for development and the strengthening of public support for the system.

43. ACC noted that experience within the system in developing partnerships with civil society and the private sector varies considerably from sector to sector, but covers, in different degrees, the whole spectrum of the activities and concerns of the system. While recognizing that the association of several United Nations organizations with civil society

is both wide-ranging and long-standing, ACC concluded that the pattern of such relationships should be further deepened and made more systematic and mutually reinforcing across the system. ACC considered it especially important that the energies of civil society should be fully tapped to build advocacy and resource mobilization constituencies for addressing global concerns and in support of operations at the country level. With regard to the latter, the need was especially emphasized to develop further modalities of collaboration with community-based organizations, which represent an increasingly important part of support structures for social cohesion and development work, in particular in conflict situations where the more formal political and institutional infrastructure may have eroded.

44. ACC encouraged greater exchange of information among the organizations of the system on the policies, directives and practices of cooperation with civil society partners so as to identify and build on best practices, and agreed to give further consideration in this context to the feasibility of establishing an inter-agency enterprise liaison service to serve as a common clearing-house mechanism for cooperation with the business community. ACC also recommended that further consideration be given by all organizations of the system to issues related to accountability, representation, and criteria for assessing competence, as well as to ways of promoting, where necessary, capacity-building of civil society groups at the national and local levels in support of national development, humanitarian assistance and peace-building.

45. ACC encouraged more systematic consultation with relevant non-State actors in the preparation of substantive as well as coordination reports, particularly on follow-up to recent global conferences. It also agreed that the United Nations Staff College should be encouraged to develop specific programmes that would help to enhance staff capacity for working more closely with civil society.

IV. Peace-building in crisis situations

46. Preventing conflict situations or, when that does not prove possible, ensuring their resolution on a lasting basis, is one of the key aims of the United Nations. During 1997, ACC considered under a broad agenda item on peace-building in crisis situations, ways of drawing maximum advantage of the range of capacities available in the United Nations system – its capabilities for political mediation and humanitarian action, its analytical resources to address the basic factors that lie at the root of existing or potential conflicts, and its experience in development cooperation – to build and sustain peace.

47. The Committee agreed that peace-building, as a broad-based approach to crisis prevention and resolution, requires integrated and coordinated actions aimed at addressing any combination of political, military, humanitarian, human rights, environmental, economic, social, cultural and demographic factors to ensure the prevention of conflict or its resolution on a lasting basis. It reiterated the importance, in such situations, of ensuring that support for long-term, sustainable development is not interrupted, or is resumed as expeditiously as possible.

48. In addressing the resource implications of providing such comprehensive support to countries threatened by or emerging from conflicts, ACC called for a stronger commitment by bilateral and other donors to peace-building requirements, and stressed the need to harmonize resource mobilization efforts in order to ensure adequate funding not only for immediate rehabilitation, but also for longer-term recovery and development activities. To

this end, the importance of supporting and assisting affected countries to enhance their absorptive capacity was also generally acknowledged.

49. In the same context, ACC considered ways of reinforcing the system's overall capacity for early warning, to enable it to alert the international community in a timely manner to potential crisis situations, and act early to avert such crises. Existing arrangements for this purpose should be built on and strengthened through more regular and systematic information exchanges, leading to integrated assessments of trends. To the same end, linkages between the system's analytical capacities and its operations in the political, humanitarian and development fields needed to be established more systematically.

50. ACC agreed that, in country situations in which, in addition to ongoing humanitarian and development activities, the United Nations operates mandated political programmes with the primary purpose of preventing, controlling and/or finding resolutions to conflicts, the achievement of those political objectives and the consolidation of peace needed to be supported by an integrated effort by the entire United Nations system. It recognized the importance, in such situations, of achieving a clear and common understanding of the respective roles that the various actors within the United Nations system, both at headquarters and in the field, are called upon to play to address the various factors underlying the conflict situation.

51. ACC, in the light of the above considerations, endorsed the recommendations of its Consultative Committee on Programme and Operational Questions for the elaboration of a strategic framework for response to and recovery from crisis, to be developed in consultation with the authorities concerned, and called for its testing in selected countries, in consultation with the authorities concerned and with the active participation of multilateral and bilateral donors and interested non-governmental organizations.

52. In the same context, the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in all activities undertaken by the United Nations system in the areas of peacekeeping, peace-building, reconciliation, reconstruction, rehabilitation and development was reaffirmed.

V. African economic recovery and development

53. African economic recovery and development continued to be a priority concern on the agenda of ACC during 1997. The Committee kept under review progress being made through the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa in achieving a greater impact of the system's programmes at the country level, and the effectiveness, in that context, of the Special Initiative as the implementation arm of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s. The contribution of the Special Initiative to promoting or reinforcing development programmes in a number of countries in such areas as health, education, governance and communications for peace-building, was reviewed and the lessons learned analysed. Country retreats being held by United Nations resident coordinators and United Nations country teams, with the participation of representatives of the Bretton Woods institutions, as part of the Special Initiative, were proving instrumental in sustaining commitment to the Special Initiative and furthering inter-agency cooperation in support of its priority objectives.

54. In the same context, ACC addressed ways of strengthening linkages between the Special Initiative and other international development cooperation undertakings, such as the Tokyo International Conference on African Development, the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Debt Initiative, and the Alliance for Africa's Industrialization.

VI. Operational activities for development

55. CCPOQ, on behalf of ACC, reviewed preparations for the triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities for development of the United Nations system, scheduled to take place in 1998.

56. ACC considered that the triennial review should examine linkages between development and emergency and humanitarian activities; facilitate the mapping of institutional mechanisms relevant to operational activities and their coordination; and assess progress concerning the coordination of the functioning of the resident coordinator system, common premises and common services, and the development of impact indicators and impact evaluation. The report should reflect the continuing dialogue taking place at the inter-agency level to enhance the coherence and effectiveness of the system's operational activities, but should, at the same time, be transparent in identifying problem areas being encountered in the process.

VII. Assistance to countries invoking Article 50 of the Charter of the United Nations

57. At its thirty-seventh session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination[3] expressed support for measures undertaken by the United Nations system in assisting third countries affected by the implementation of Security Council resolutions 661 (1990) and 724 (1991) and requested that the item be kept on the agenda of ACC. Information on the measures undertaken by the United Nations system to provide assistance to affected States was first contained in the report of the Secretary-General on the question of special economic problems of States as a result of sanctions imposed under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations (A/48/573-S/26705), and in the annual overview reports of ACC (E/1993/81, E/1994/19, E/1995/21, E/1996/18 and Add.1, E/1997/54 and Corr.1).

58. The General Assembly, in its resolution 52/169 H, took note of the report of the Secretary-General on economic assistance to States affected by the implementation of the Security Council resolutions imposing sanctions on the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (A/52/535) and renewed its invitation to all States and the relevant international organizations, both within and outside the United Nations system, in particular the international financial institutions, to continue to take into account the special needs of the affected States in providing assistance to them during the transition period following the lifting of the sanctions. It also requested the Secretary-General to report to the General Assembly at its fifty-fourth session on the implementation of the resolution.

59. Further, the General Assembly, in its resolution 52/162, endorsed the proposal of the Secretary-General, contained in his report on the implementation of the provisions of the Charter related to assistance to third States affected by the application of sanctions (A/52/308), that an ad hoc expert group meeting be convened in the first half of 1998 with a view to developing a possible methodology for assessing the consequences actually incurred by third States as a result of preventive or enforcement measures. The Assembly endorsed the recommendation of the Secretary-General that the expert group explore

[3] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-second Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/52/16), chap. IV, sect. A.

innovative and practical measures of assistance that could be provided by the relevant organizations, both within and outside the United Nations system, to the affected third States. It also invited the organizations of the United Nations system, international financial institutions, other international organizations, regional organizations and Member States to address more specifically and directly, where appropriate, special economic problems of affected third States, and for this purpose, to consider improving procedures for consultations to maintain a dialogue with such States, including through regular and frequent meetings as well as, where appropriate, special meetings between the affected third States and the donor community, with the participation of United Nations agencies and other international organizations. The Secretary-General will submit to the General Assembly, at its fifty-third session, a report on the implementation of Assembly resolution 52/162.

VIII. Other matters

A. Follow-up to the Graça Machel study on the impact of armed conflict on children

60. ACC's review of the Graça Machel study on the situation of children affected by armed conflict (A/51/306 and Add.1) provided an opportunity for the organizations of the United Nations system to review their contribution to furthering the rights of the child and to give special attention to the coordination of actions and the achievement of concrete results at the country level, in line with the relevant recommendations contained in General Assembly resolution 51/77.

61. ACC requested CCPOQ to develop ways to link child-related rehabilitation and development activities with relief and recovery and to ensure that relevant operational guidelines, appeals and strategy proposals reflected the specific needs of children affected by war. It further requested that the relevant recommendations of the study be integrated, to the extent possible, into ongoing activities related to the coordinated follow-up to recent United Nations global conferences, and pursued as part of the peace-building, conflict-resolution and national reconciliation activities of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa.

62. The members of ACC also pledged to give special attention to the needs and rights of street children and refugee and internally displaced children and to strengthen, within their respective work programmes, activities for the promotion and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

63. ACC agreed that concerned organizations within the United Nations system should develop inter-agency guidelines for activities related to children affected by armed conflict. United Nations system country teams and field personnel, including the staff of humanitarian relief operations, were similarly invited to accord priority attention to the issue of children affected by armed conflict.

B. Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS)

64. ACC reviewed progress in the work of the Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), which was established in 1996 with the objective

of providing a United Nations system coordinated response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic, including support to HIV/AIDS prevention activities at the country level.

65. In recognizing that there were clear indications of initial programme successes, ACC reiterated that the challenge of HIV/AIDS required a concerted system-wide response, and called for the further strengthening of inter-agency collaboration in combating the epidemic. ACC took note of the joint statement on HIV/AIDS prepared by the UNAIDS Committee of Co-sponsoring Organizations[4] and fully supported the appeal made by the Executive Director of UNAIDS to other organizations of the United Nations system to join in a renewed effort to address the epidemic in all its dimensions.

IX. Administrative questions

A. Security of United Nations system staff

66. During 1997, the United Nations Security Coordinator kept ACC briefed on developments concerning the security and safety of United Nations system staff and associated personnel in the field. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other executive heads reiterated their concern at the growing number of incidents and threats to the security of staff in the field, and shared information with the Committee on relevant measures being taken in their respective organizations to address the situation.

67. ACC stressed the need for Governments to be made fully aware of system-wide security policies in order to enlist their support, at the highest political level, for the implementation of those policies. The key role to be played by United Nations resident coordinator and designated security officials was emphasized.

68. ACC adopted a statement on staff security (see annex IV below) and urged that its implementation be given urgent attention by its subsidiary bodies concerned and within the system as a whole. It agreed to continue to give priority consideration, in the course of 1998, to measures required to further enhance the coordination and effective management of staff security arrangements in crisis situations.

B. Conditions of service and application of the Noblemaire principle

69. On the basis of the analyses and recommendations of its Consultative Committee on Administrative Questions (CCAQ), ACC adopted a statement on conditions of service and the application of the Noblemaire principle (see annex V below),[5] reflecting its continuing concern regarding the need for urgent measures to restore the competitiveness of United Nations common system conditions of service, including the remuneration of the Professional and higher categories of staff of the organizations of the system. The General Assembly, at its fifty-second session, took note of the statement (resolution 52/216).

[4] The UNAIDS Committee of Co-sponsoring Organizations comprises the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the World Health Organization and the World Bank.

[5] One executive head indicated that he could not concur with the statement.

Part two. Elements of the programme of work of ACC for 1998

70. ACC will continue to address, during 1998, key policy issues requiring a system-wide response. The comprehensive review of the integrated and coordinated implementation and follow-up of global conferences and summits being undertaken by ACC will be completed early in 1998, and will be reflected in the report of the Secretary-General prepared for a session of the Economic and Social Council in May 1998. In the same context, in response to an initiative by the Secretary-General, ACC members agreed to give renewed attention to elaborating the elements of a common framework for action by the system in the fight against poverty. Pursuant to ACC's review, CCPOQ, IACSD and IACWGE will be responsible for operationalizing such a common framework, as part of the effort to maintain the momentum for national and international action to follow up recent global conferences, and to give renewed impetus to collaborative actions by organizations of the system at the country level.

71. ACC is also expected to continue the effort, initiated in 1997, to develop strategic frameworks for peace-building in crisis situations. It will also continue to monitor progress in the implementation of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa, including the work of its Steering Committee, as well as the role of the Initiative in the implementation of the United Nations New Agenda for the Development of Africa in the 1990s. Intergovernmental action on the report of the Secretary-General on the causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa (A/52/871-S/1998/318) is expected to provide new impetus to inter-agency collaboration in support of African development.

72. The contribution of ACC to the overall process of reform and strengthening of the United Nations system is expected to be further deepened in 1998. It will include the initiation of an in-depth review of new policy and programme orientations being introduced by individual organizations of the system, as part of ongoing reform processes, and an assessment of their implications for other parts of the system, as well as of their impact on the overall coherence and effectiveness of the system as a whole.

73. Continuing attention will be given by ACC, in the same context, to the development of partnerships between the organizations of the system and non-State actors – non-governmental organizations as well as the business community – and the sharing of experiences and best practices in this area.

74. The implementation of the provisions of the Charter of the United Nations related to assistance to third States affected by the application of sanctions will remain part of the work of ACC.

75. ACC will continue to address the issue of the security and safety of United Nations staff and associated personnel on an urgent basis, in particular the coordinated and follow-up to the implementation of the recommendations contained in the ACC statement on staff security. This will include follow-up on the recommendations of the high-level CCAQ and the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Meeting on Security.

76. As part of a continuing effort to improve its own functioning and that of its subsidiary machinery, ACC is developing a number of initiatives designed, through the use of communication and information technologies, to intensify the policy dialogue among executive heads of member organizations and facilitate consultations among them on a continuing basis. ACC will also continue to introduce improved and more cost-effective methods of work for its subsidiary machinery. Under the guidance of ACC, the Information

Systems Coordination Committee will continue to give priority attention to enhancing the use of information technology to improve access to United Nations system information and ensure its wider dissemination.

ANNEX I

Excerpt from the statement by the Secretary-General to the Economic and Social Council on 6 February 1998*

[...]

I am grateful for the Council initiative which led to this meeting today.

[...]

Your initiative is also very much in line with the spirit of the reform programme I launched last year: a call for the strengthening of interaction and the building of new partnerships within, as well as between, Secretariat structures, and the intergovernmental machinery was one of the main themes underlying that programme.

And a dialogue between the Council and the Secretary-General, as Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC), is indeed a necessity if we are to realize one of the main objectives of the reform process: mobilizing the system in order to place development at the top of the international agenda.

In line with your suggestions, Mr. President, I will not confine myself to the outcome of the fall session of the ACC. I will share with you some reflections on the role of the ACC and the evolution of its work over last year.

The ACC is a unique instrument. In many ways, it is the symbol of the unity of purpose of the system; of the decentralized, diverse, but united system that our founders envisaged as the instrument to harness the specialized capacities and constituencies of the various agencies to meet the economic and social objectives of the Charter. But the ACC can and should be far more than a symbol. And I believe that we have only begun to exploit its potential:

-- its potential as an instrument of leadership for the Secretary-General in bringing to bear the wide-ranging capacities of the system on the overall effort to advance security and development;

-- its potential as a collective source of advice to intergovernmental bodies and as an instrument for pursuing in a comprehensive way intergovernmental mandates; and

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* For the complete text, see document SG/SM/6455.

– its potential as a source of support for individual organizations within the system, in the face of challenges that are beyond the capacity of any one of them to address.

Let me comment on each of those three points.

Since the beginning of my term, I have given a great deal of personal attention to my responsibilities as Chairman of the ACC; to building and strengthening my personal relations with the executive heads of the system; and to reinforcing a sense of common purpose among them. I view this as key to the overall effort to revitalize the economic and social role of the United Nations and international cooperation for development.

In the past few years, there has also been a very positive evolution of the relationship between the ACC and the central intergovernmental machinery charged with coordination responsibilities -- particularly this Council. Some of the mutual suspicions of the past are being steadily replaced by a new sense of partnership and shared responsibility.

The recent global conferences and summits -- which have shown the unique convening power of the Organization -- have been a turning point in this evolution. They have brought out for agencies the full capacity of the United Nations to establish policy frameworks which build on their distinct roles and capacities and, at the same time, impart to them common directions sanctioned at the highest level.

In turn, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly have appreciated the ACC taking the lead in arranging for the system to identify, from the results of these conferences and summits, cross-cutting themes and common operational and programme priorities. This will, in turn, help the Council reassert its role in providing policy direction and ensure coordinated implementation. It is an excellent example of the mutually reinforcing relations that the ACC and the Council must nurture.

But the most significant evolution I have perceived lies in the Executive Heads' own perceptions of the role of the ACC and inter-agency coordination. The wide-ranging discussions that have taken place in the ACC over the past year have brought to the fore the major strategic and managerial challenges confronting the system as a whole; they have strengthened the realization that the future of each part of the system cannot be separated from that of its other parts; and they have led to a renewed commitment to utilizing the ACC as the privileged forum where Executive Heads' programme and managerial initiatives should be concerted, and their impact on the overall capacity of the system and its future assessed.

The ACC's discussions on reform during the past year have been pursued in this perspective.

Executive Heads committed themselves to a continuing exchange of information on these processes to ensure that they are mutually supportive; that policy, programme and managerial

implications for other organizations are taken into account; and that best practices are institutionalized and drawn upon system-wide.

Another major theme of the ACC's work during the year came under the broad heading of "peace-building". It involved the development of a common, system-wide "strategic framework" that would help harness the capacities available throughout the system for assisting countries in responding to crisis, and recovering from it.

The objective is to integrate the system's analytical capabilities, its capacity for political mediation and humanitarian intervention, and its experience in development cooperation into a coherent force to build and sustain peace; but also to address the basic factors at the root of ongoing or potential conflicts.

Mr. President, you have spoken eloquently about these issues in the Security Council, highlighting the crucial requirement of reconciliation. This is, indeed, a crucial component of peace-building where many of the agencies have, actually or potentially, a great deal to offer. We shall pursue this important dimension in shaping further the elements of the "strategic framework".

The ACC also gave continuing attention during the year to the implementation and impact of the United Nations System-wide Special Initiative on Africa. And I have begun an intensive process of inter-agency consultations aimed at developing a concerted system-wide approach to the major reconstruction and development challenges being faced by the countries of the Great Lakes region.

I am confident that, working with governments in the region, and with the support of other development partners, the United Nations system is in a position to launch a well-coordinated effort to help these countries resume their path to development.

A further major focus for the ACC during 1997 was the challenge of enlisting the increasingly essential cooperation of civil society -- including the private sector -- in handling the global agenda.

There was a broad consensus that a strengthening of the system's partnerships with civil society should be viewed as a key objective of the reform processes currently under way. These partnerships are indeed an important dimension of the effort to adapt the system to the changes that are taking place in the national and international environment. And they are directly relevant to many of the major issues before us -- from increasing resource flows and strengthening the system's impact on development, to enhancing public support for the United Nations.

In conjunction with the ACC's October session, we held the first ever Retreat of ACC members. It was attended -- as was the first ACC session I chaired in April -- by all the heads of ACC member organizations.

Focusing on the changing role of the State and its implications for the United Nations system, our discussions addressed programme and institutional implications arising from globalization and other trends in the world economy. We also reviewed key issues such as the prospects for development cooperation and new approaches to development financing. And we considered how to adapt the role and functioning of the ACC to the demands of the new international context.

Drawing on the outcome of the retreat, I expect the ACC session in March to finalize several new initiatives that will facilitate a more effective policy dialogue within the system; these range from a dedicated information network to frequent Executive Heads-level consultations making use of teleconferencing.

[...]

In May, the Council will convene a special session to further consider the follow-up to major United Nations conferences and summits.

The ACC will place before the Council its assessment of the impact of the thematic task forces it had charged with promoting an integrated follow-up to the results of these conferences.

I hope that the Council will be able to reinforce the international community's commitment to the agreements reached; and that it will, at the same time, forge ahead with future efforts to meet the underlying objectives of these conferences: a concerted attack on poverty.

You can count on the ACC giving the utmost priority to harnessing all the capacities of the system in support of this effort.

Indeed, in all areas of your work, you can count on the full support of the ACC and on the readiness of the organizations of the system to engage with you in a continuous, sustained dialogue. Agency policies and activities should not only be the subject of the work of this Council; they should provide its main foundation.

Today, I join you in a spirit of commitment to the work of the Organization in the economic and social fields. I am confident that we can achieve our goals. I pledge to you my full support and I wish you every success.

Annex II

Statement by the Administrative Committee on Coordination on universal access to basic communication and information services

1. The world is in the midst of a communication and information revolution, complemented by an explosive growth in knowledge. Information and knowledge have become a factor *sui generis* in societal and economic development, as generic technologies, information and communication technologies permeate and cut across all areas of economic, social, cultural and political activity. In the process, they affect all social institutions, perceptions and thought processes. Globally, the information and communication sector is already expanding at twice the rate of the world economy. Decreasing costs of increasingly powerful and reliable hardware and software, as well as the fact that much hardware has become a desktop item, will continue to drive the use of information and communication technologies, facilitating access by ever wider segments of society. That tendency can, however, have profound benefits only if gains in physical access are accompanied by the capacity to exploit those technologies for individual and societal development through the production and dissemination of appropriate content and applications.

2. The communication and information revolution opens up entirely new vistas for the organizations of the United Nations system; it will bring about a dramatic shift not only in the way the organizations operate in the future, and deliver services and products, but also in the way they collaborate and interact with each other and other actors. Indeed, the multilateral system as a whole — specifically development cooperation — has reached a threshold at which its future orientations, strategies and activities must be revisited and adjusted to the new circumstances and opportunities. We are resolved to respond readily and effectively to those new challenges.

3. We recognize that knowledge and information:

(a) Represent the lifeblood of the emerging global information society and its attendant infrastructure;

(b) Are the principal resources of the burgeoning information economy;

(c) Are at the heart of the intensifying globalization trends, and drive the emergence of a tele-economy with new global and societal organizational models (telework, telecommuting, teleservices, telemedicine, distance education, teletraining, teleshopping, telebanking, business facilitation, trade efficiency, trade information and so forth); in many instances, physical location is becoming irrelevant to the ability to receive or deliver products and services;

(d) Will increasingly affect the international division of labour, determine the competitiveness of corporations and national economies, and generate new growth patterns and paradigms;

(e) Will have strategic consequences for the global power constellation. Knowledge, more than ever, is power. Information about what is occurring becomes a central commodity of international relations, and determines the efficiency and effectiveness of any intervention, which is a particular challenge for multilateral actors.

4. Information is not a free good. Comparative advantages will henceforth be expressed in the ability of countries to acquire, organize, retrieve and disseminate information through communication, information-processing technologies and complex information networks to support policy-making and the development process. Abilities in those areas may allow the prevention and resolution of regional and other conflicts, or may deal with new challenges, such as international crime, terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and environmental damage, by charting better informed decisions, all of which are of utmost concern to the organizations of the United Nations system.

5. We are profoundly concerned at the increasingly inadequate distribution of access, resources and opportunities in the information and communication field. The information and technology gap and related inequities between industrialized and developing nations are widening, so that a new type of poverty, information poverty, is being created. Most developing countries, especially the least developed countries, are not sharing in the communication revolution, since they lack:

(a) Affordable access to core information resources, cutting-edge technology and sophisticated telecommunication systems and infrastructure;

(b) The capacity to build, operate, manage and service the technologies involved;

(c) Policies that promote equitable public participation in the information society, as both producers and consumers of information and knowledge;

(d) A workforce trained to develop, maintain and provide the value-added products and services required by the information economy.

We therefore commit the organizations of the United Nations system to assisting developing countries in redressing the present alarming trends.

6. Over the past decades, the organizations of the United Nations system have carried out many projects, at various levels, incorporating communication and information technologies. Today, however, we must acknowledge that such projects were often undertaken in a rather uncoordinated manner. We therefore perceive an urgent need for a more strategic and systematic approach to information and communication technologies and information management, based on a strengthened collaboration among the organizations of the United Nations system.

7. We have concluded that the introduction and use of information and communication technologies and information management must become an integral element of the priority efforts by the United Nations system to promote and secure sustainable human development for all; hence our decision to embrace the objective of establishing universal access to basic communication and information services for all. Information and communication technologies and effective information management offer hitherto unknown possibilities and modalities for the solution of global problems to help fulfil social development goals and to build capacities to effectively use the new technologies. At the same time, infrastructure and services of physical communication, in particular postal services, are a means of communication widely and universally used throughout the world, particularly in developing countries. Postal services are vital and, for the foreseeable future, will remain essential to promoting trade, industry and services of all kinds. Indeed, the value of postal services will be further enhanced as new services, such as hybrid mail, a combination of electronic transmission and physical delivery, gain ground.

8. Individually and jointly, our organizations are already carrying out, or are planning at the national level to embark on, various projects and activities to highlight the catalytic role that multilateral organizations can and must play in this increasingly vital area. We pledge to do more by joining forces in a variety of fields, such as agriculture, education, health, natural resources and environmental management, transport, international trade and commerce, employment and labour issues, housing, infrastructure and community services, small and medium enterprise development, and strengthening of participatory arrangements (see appendix). It is our intention and determination to demonstrate the viability and suitability of the new technologies and effective information management, especially by reaching out to and targeting the rural areas and most impoverished segments of society so often bypassed by the benefits of technological progress. Unless we are able to show that information and communication technologies make a difference and reach out to more poor people or deliver better services to larger segments of society, the potential of information and communication technologies and information management will remain unrealized.

9. Harnessing and spreading the potential of the new communication technologies to countries, especially in the developing world, in a timely, cost-effective and equitable manner will be a daunting challenge. The telecommunication infrastructure is weak in virtually all developing countries. The 59 lowest income countries (which account for about 56 per cent of the world's population) share only 7 per cent of the world's telephone mainlines. Excluding China and India, the 57 lowest income countries (which together account for one fifth of the world's population) have one hundredth of the global telephone mainlines. Wherever there is connectivity, it is limited to major cities, the waiting lists are long and there is no indication that the situation will improve dramatically soon. Within the limits of its resources and priorities, the United Nations system stands ready to assist Governments in designing national policies, plans and strategies to facilitate and guide the development and management of an appropriate national information infrastructure, in accordance with their needs and traditions.

10. Information and communication technologies hold the prospect of an accelerated introduction of certain state-of-the-art technologies, superseding the step-by-step process of transferring know-how and technologies that has dominated industrialization processes. Successful leapfrogging will allow developing countries to advance, bypassing stages of technology development. Although aware of the considerable practical hurdles, we are nevertheless determined to assist developing countries in that quest.

11. We are equally conscious of the imperative to build human and technical capacities to enable societies to facilitate access and make best use of the new multimedia communication resources. The rapid expansion of the Internet and its interactive character have introduced a dramatic paradigm shift in the retrieval, handling and dissemination of information. Such technologies make it possible for those who need information and knowledge to look for it on an electronic network and download what they need when they need it. The explosion of the Internet and the World Wide Web have created an easy-to-use communication interface for linking together computers in every part of the world for

communications, information and data exchange, that is, for those who can afford it.

12. The emphasis on such networks as the Internet, however, should not distract from the potential role and contribution other information and communication technologies can make in advancing sustainable human development. Advances in CD-ROM technology, for example, have made multimedia and large-scale data transfers accessible to developing countries, even in areas where there is no telecommunication connectivity. Many of the multimedia options, especially the Internet, depend on the availability of reliable, powerful telecommunication connections with a sufficient bandwidth, as well as access to electricity grids or renewable energy, such as solar power, which are other limiting factors in the poorest areas. Widespread illiteracy, diverse cultures and linguistic differences pose additional obstacles for the introduction of new technologies on a universal basis.

13. Massive investment in telecommunication networks throughout the world has helped to link most developing countries to international telecommunication networks, albeit in most cases only their capital cities. To date, that connectivity invariably bypasses rural areas and hinterlands of developing countries, where the incidence of poverty is highest. We believe, therefore, that the expansion of domestic telecommunication infrastructure to rural areas and its connection to reliable international networks must become a top priority for Governments, the private sector and multilateral and bilateral development organizations. Unless telecommunication systems can be expanded, access will be confined to an urban, literate elite in developing countries, bypassing rural areas and the poor. Here, rapidly emerging digital satellite systems offer new solutions.

14. One indication of the magnitude of investment required is the estimate that in sub-Saharan Africa, raising teledensity to 1 telephone mainline per 100 inhabitants (from the current 0.46 mainlines per 100 inhabitants) would require an investment of US$ 8 billion. The estimate assumes, however, that the cost of a mainline closely mirrors prevailing international prices, whereas experience shows that, typically, the cost tends to be about three times higher in sub-Saharan Africa. The enormity and scale of the challenge to provide universal access in basic communication and information services to the developing world would thus make it advisable to focus on the community level and on reinforcing major development missions, such as education, rather than the household or individual level. Even so, harnessing and spreading the potential of the new information and communication technologies to developing countries will be a daunting challenge.

15. The organizations of the United Nations system alone cannot undertake such a massive and exceedingly costly investment, which will help to alleviate poverty, create new livelihoods and open up new markets. We call upon the private sector, Governments, civil society and other development organizations to engage with us in a purposeful and systematic endeavour to shape and manage this process by:

(a) Establishing and promoting a common global vision and broad-based awareness of the changes taking place, and articulating a compelling vision and strategy of how new technologies can be made to benefit all countries, particularly the poorest;

(b) Building national human, technical and economic capacities to facilitate access to and utilization of information and communication technologies in developing countries;

(c) Promoting multimedia information and communication technologies in the delivery of programmes advancing sustainable human development, especially to rural areas;

(d) Promoting, with the participation of the private sector, the creation, management and dissemination of strategic information and data pertaining to the various dimensions of development at the global, regional, national and community levels.

16. We are conscious of the fact that modern communication links, especially Web-based approaches, will have a material impact on programmes, programme content, modalities and quality of delivery, and hence on the future of multilateral cooperation and technical assistance per se. For our part, we will accelerate our ongoing internal reform and change processes to create modern, cost-effective and globally networked organizations, involving a strengthening of our in-house technical capacities and changing staff attitudes and perceptions, especially among senior managers. Another objective will be to strengthen ties and intensify communication among our remote offices, opening up opportunities for decentralization and for an instantaneous presence of technical back-up and support.

17. In addition, we intend to harmonize and coordinate our strategies for modernizing and enhancing capacities and effectiveness. The objective will be to create a United Nations system-wide "Intranet" (an Internet for internal usage) to facilitate cooperation among the organizations and ensure the integrated exploitation of the competencies of organizations and coordination at the national level. We shall seek to promote cooperation among our respective organizations through the use of compatible systems, which we already pursue through the separate mechanism of the Information

Systems Coordination Committee. We aim to ensure the compatibility, accessibility and convergence of communications and computer-based systems.

18. All of this must be complemented by constantly updated and well-managed Web sites for each of our organizations offering hyperlinks to relevant Web sites both within and outside the United Nations system. This will confer competence and global authority to our organizations in the electronic age. Indeed, as assessing reliability becomes difficult, with more than 65 million Web pages on the Internet, the entities of the United Nations system should become Web focal points, each in their area of competence. We must strive to make our Web sites the foremost entry points for information on poverty, development and sustainability, and universal human values and heritage. The Information Systems Coordination Committee, which was established in 1994 with the intent of harmonizing the approaches of United Nations organizations and facilitating access to United Nations related information, has made a good start.

19. We also need to explore and comprehend the implications and potential of the error of information and communication technologies. Do rapid technological advances trigger the emergence of a right to communicate and a right to access information? What are the consequences for the global labour market, including the gender impact and the role of trade unions, and the international division of labour; the prospects for access to global markets for goods, products and services from developing country economies; the opportunities for global sourcing; the scope for participatory approaches involving youth, local and community groups, women and indigenous organizations, and other disenfranchised groups; the impact on the elderly; the consequences for traditional postal services; the dimensions of international copyright and trade in services?

20. At present, innovation in terms of choices, approaches and content responds by and large to the needs and perceptions of industrialized countries and their business sector. We suggest that innovations for both hardware and software must also become demand-driven and needs-driven so as to respond to development objectives and needs. Such a shift from supply-driven to needs-driven approaches must become a global priority, and must influence the direction and pace of future innovation. Only then can information and communication technologies take hold and make a significant impact in developing countries, which are after all the markets of the future. Among other things, this will require the design of products suitable for use in electricity-poor environments (including hardware independent of electric power, such as solar-based or crank-technology driven hardware) and for use by illiterate people (facilitating accessibility through iconographic software, and culturally and linguistically diverse content). Partnerships and alliances will, however, be driven both by technical and financial realities.

21. Thus, we are particularly concerned by the staggering financial needs required to narrow the present gap between those who have access to information and those who have not. A scarcity of funds and insufficient investment flows inevitably hamper the modernization of telecommunication networks and the introduction of promising technologies for advancing sustainable human development. As official development assistance flows are not projected to increase dramatically over the next few years, we must stimulate innovative approaches to raise a critical mass of resources.

22. In our view, the sheer magnitude of the task will necessitate the urgent formation of new and novel cooperative mechanisms:

(a) Industry alliances linking developed and developing countries;

(b) Collaborative partnerships across traditional lines, that is, among the Government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, foundations, academic entities, actors of civil society, and intergovernmental and international organizations.

23. We, the heads of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system, have agreed to pursue cooperatively and in a more systematic manner the development of strategic approaches to the broad issues of the global information economy and society; therefore, we have agreed to commit ourselves to improving universal access to basic communication and information services.

24. In order to demonstrate our ability to bridge the information gap, we have agreed to undertake, through coordinated action at the country level, pilot projects in the broad areas indicated in the appendix hereto.

25. The involvement of Member States is essential in responding to the challenges of change. We therefore invite the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, to bring the present statement to the attention of the General Assembly with a view to seeking its endorsement. Executive heads will also submit the statement to the governing bodies of their respective organizations.

Appendix

Indicative areas for possible pilot projects

1. *Interactive long-distance education and learning.* Conventional teaching and learning methods are increasingly unable to respond to the rising demand for learning, driven by burgeoning illiteracy, a dearth of well-qualified teachers and faculty, shrinking public funds for the educational sector, and the growing acceptance of the concept of lifelong learning in a world driven by rapid change. At all levels of the educational process, long-distance education can become a viable complement to conventional schooling and training, in particular reaching out and delivering educational services to isolated countries and regions, which often are the poorest. Where even television may prove to be unaffordable, one must rely on radio and the development of community-based media, especially rural radio.

2. *Telemedicine.* Telemedicine comprises opportunities for medical practice and education through the combination of telecommunication and medical technologies. Telemedicine allows interactive audiovisual communication between physician and practitioner in distant locations, facilitates the exchange of medical information for research and educational purposes, and enables diagnostic imaging and clinical analysis from a distance to compensate for a lack of specialists or to dispense advice to doctors. Electronic means may thus help to improve the quality and delivery of health and reproductive services to rural areas. Access to computer and telecommunication services can help to transform the role of health workers, and to enhance the quality and outreach of health services and preventive health care in underserviced rural communities.

3. *Telebanking and micro-credit schemes.* Telebanking can assist banks in adjusting to the needs of the poor, communicating with the illiterate and poor at the village level and promoting micro-credit schemes. The available technology is tailor-made for a market characterized by a vast, impoverished and mostly illiterate rural population, high crime and widespread fraud.

4. *Environmental protection and management.* Environmental protection and management is a wide field for various applications of information technologies, including sustainable forestry and logging practices, waste management and disposal, support to agricultural extension services, water resource management, managing irrigation and natural resource exploitation.

5. *Participatory processes, arrangements and good governance.* Communication is not only a means to disseminate knowledge, information and values, it is also a basic component of all democratic societies. Its instantaneous character is bound to affect decision-making in the political, economic and business spheres. It will also have an impact on democratic (or autocratic) systems and governance structures, affecting their responsiveness, transparency and accountability, and will strengthen participatory and people-centred approaches within civil society, empowering especially women and youth. The technology is suitable for creating at the community level novel structures to manage individual and public affairs by all stakeholders in sustainable development and for empowering those most affected by poverty by providing broad-based access to information and partners.

6. *Virtual laboratories for solving development problems.* New methods of work which were still unthinkable just a year ago are now possible. By combining the Internet, virtual reality, real time 3D computing, other telecommunication technologies, groupware and virtual team work, it is now possible to create permanent invisible colleges of scientists working on critical research subjects, at relatively little cost. The principal objective is to link researchers aware of the special needs and with knowledge of the developing countries to the infrastructure and practices already firmly established in the developed countries in order to provide access to scientific know-how and information more quickly, on a larger scale and in an interactive format, allowing for the most rapid dissemination of such information. Those techniques are one solution to the South-North brain drain, which would allow scientists from the South to be associated virtually with all key discussions taking place in the world research community.

7. *Universal access to the world's knowledge and culture.* Public information institutions, which are a natural focus for access to the information needed for development, have not been able to exploit their potential to the full in developing countries owing to the immensity of the needs involved and scarcity of resources. Information and communication technologies provide such institutions with a means to promote cost-effective, development-oriented information services for all sectors of society, building on networking at the national and regional levels. Of particular importance is information in the public domain that the information market seems to neglect, for varying reasons: insufficient potential profitability, small readership or, more paradoxically, the public nature of the original data. Such information should

be inventoried, digitized and accessed with Internet servers, with the support of appropriate public policies on copyright issues related to information technologies, the development of electronic cultural industries and the promotion of the Internet as a public utility accessible to all at the lowest possible cost.

ANNEX III

Statement by the Administrative Committee on Coordination to the General Assembly at its nineteenth special session

1. Sustainable development remains one of the most important challenges facing humanity as it approaches the twenty-first century. Yet there is growing concern that failure to accelerate economic growth and development in vast areas of the world, to resolve burning social problems, to correct unsustainable production and consumption patterns and increasing inequity, and to halt deterioration of the environment will irreversibly limit national capacities to respond to future challenges.

2. It is the collective view of the executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system participating in the Administrative Committee on Coordination that the concept of sustainable development provides an over-arching policy framework for the entire spectrum of United Nations system-wide activities at the global, regional and country levels. Sustainable development, as set out in Agenda 21, the action plan of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held at Rio de Janeiro, calls for the implementation of inter-related policies promoting economic development, improved social equity and environmental sustainability. As such, it requires a more integrated approach to policy development, involving new ways of thinking, new institutional mechanisms and new partnerships with a wide variety of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders.

3. A renewed system-wide effort is called for to address the implications of globalization and liberalization in the world economy, bearing in mind the major new opportunities being opened up for trade and investment and information and technology flows, but also the risks of marginalization of the poorest countries, and the poorest groups, especially women and children, within countries.

4. International commitments to achieving sustainable development have been strengthened by the outcomes of the series of major world development conferences held during the 1990s.[1] These meetings have focused attention on the social dimension of sustainable development, in particular the overwhelming priority of poverty alleviation. Widespread poverty is a core factor in perpetuating economic stagnation, social deprivation, ill health and environmental degradation. Other conferences have increased attention to the socio-economic aspects of sustainable development.[2]

5. Successful efforts have been made to sensitize public opinion and to mobilize international cooperation, as well as to adopt specific programmes to implement Agenda 21 and to establish relevant institutional mechanisms at the international, regional, national and local levels. However, much remains to be done to restore the momentum generated at the Rio Conference and fulfil the commitments made there. Greater political leadership is needed to forge global partnership to advance Agenda 21.

6. The Administrative Committee on Coordination is resolved to meet the major challenges involved in effective implementation of commitments made at the Rio Conference. Follow-up will require a high degree of policy integration and the Committee is intent on continuing its development of effective tools and techniques to improve system-wide coordination within the United Nations system. Major change and adaptation have already been undertaken in this regard to support effective implementation at the international and national levels.

7. The Administrative Committee on Coordination attaches the greatest importance to the improvement of field-level implementation of the Rio commitments, through a coordinated approach at the country level. It particularly supports the strengthening of inter-agency cooperation at the regional level, which has great potential for practical programme delivery. Enhanced cooperation will include regional organizations outside the United Nations system.

8. The Administrative Committee on Coordination is committed to the further enhancement of cooperation among organizations of the United Nations system and a wide variety of non-governmental stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations, major groups and other components of civil society. Linkages among functional responsibilities for information resources, policy development and operational programmes will be explored in the period following the 1997 review.

9. The Administrative Committee on Coordination believes that the task manager system of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development has led to more effective use of resources and expertise within the United Nations system and is a promising improvement over previous efforts at inter-agency cooperation. However, the system has not yet reached its full potential in terms of defining policy linkages and the sharing of responsibilities to achieve full programme synergy. The Administrative Committee on Coordination will continue to strengthen inter-agency coordination with the aim of advancing more integrated and cost-efficient policy approaches. The Inter-Agency Committee will play an important role in this regard.

10. Coordination cannot be achieved at the secretariat level alone, however. The executive heads of the organizations of the United Nations system participating in the Administrative Committee on Coordination would welcome the development of clearer and more consistent intergovernmental and national level policies for sustainable development. Clear guidance at the international and national levels would greatly facilitate the efforts of United Nations agencies to carry out their mandates effectively, and reduce the possibility of dissipation of scarce financial resources.

11. An important constraint is the financial crisis affecting the United Nations and many of the specialized agencies, which leaves little room for expanded initiatives. The expectations of additional resources raised at Rio have not been fulfilled. As a result, many organizations are having difficulty in carrying out the important activities resulting from the Conference and

responding to the additional work requirements of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

12. Experience gained since the Conference has led the Administrative Committee on Coordination to the firm belief that the time has come for a new approach to policy-making which stresses practical actions to achieve sustainable development. Intergovernmental policy discussions could usefully be reoriented to focus on a limited number of strategic priority issues, the emphasis being on linkages between resource management and the role of economic actors and major groups. Such an approach would stimulate greater attention to cross-cutting issues such as population, gender, health, impact on children, production and consumption patterns, and to means of implementation, in particular financing mechanisms and technology transfer, capacity-building and education.

Notes

[1] The World Summit for Children, the World Conference on Education for All, the World Conference on Human Rights, the International Conference on Population and Development, the World Summit for Social Development, the World Conference on Natural Disaster Reduction, the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, the Fourth World Conference on Women and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements.

[2] The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (ninth session), the World Trade Organization Ministerial Meeting in Singapore and the World Food Summit.

APPENDIX

Sustainable development in the United Nations system: an explanatory note

FROM CONCEPT TO ACTION

1. The commitments made at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and other conferences have presented a major challenge to the entire system of United Nations programmes and institutions. Effective implementation of Agenda 21 and other Rio agreements, as well as the need for coherent multidisciplinary support to intergovernmental processes in the area of sustainable development, particularly to the Commission on Sustainable Development, have had a significant effect on virtually all organizations and programmes of the United Nations system, both jointly - in particular through the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development - and individually. The Administrative Committee on Coordination believes that the challenge has generally been met with enthusiasm and a solid commitment by the United Nations system. The specialized agencies and the programmes have proved flexible enough to make structural, programme and budget changes to enable them to provide support for the implementation of Agenda 21.

2. However, a key difficulty faced by the United Nations system is that not all governing and policy-making bodies have the same understanding of the concept of sustainable development. In some cases, sustainability is equated with environmentally sound management of natural resources, to the neglect of broader social and economic issues. Improved policy coordination across various governing bodies within the United Nations system is essential to ensuring policy coherence, more effective joint programming, more efficient deployment of resources and the avoidance of duplication resulting from overlapping tasks which might be mandated to different secretariats by their governing bodies.

3. Sustainable development demands a qualitatively different approach to coordination at both policy-making and programme implementation levels. United Nations agencies and secretariats of conventions have had to develop new institutional arrangements which can facilitate intersectoral cooperation, and new programming techniques within and between organizations. Institutional innovation is also occurring in national aid agencies. Greater cooperation between bilateral and multilateral agencies would enhance and encourage the wider adoption of these approaches.

4. In addition, Member States should promote effective coordination at the level of intergovernmental decision-making. In the language of Agenda 21, the Commission on Sustainable Development is to "rationalize the intergovernmental decision-making capacity for the integration of environment and development issues". This mandate has not been fully realized. The Commission's role is political; it does not have decision-making authority with respect to other intergovernmental processes, but it can promote common policy approaches, geared

to cross-sectoral issues, to advance sustainable development if relevant responses are ensured throughout the United Nations system.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

A new approach to international policy-making

5. Experience with policy development and implementation in the years since the Rio Conference has made clear the need for new approaches which stress the operational aspects of sustainable development. Intergovernmental dialogue on sustainable development could usefully be reorganized to consider a limited number of strategic priority issues, so as to develop a more focused approach to relevant activities in the United Nations system both at the international and at the regional and country levels. The Administrative Committee on Coordination supports the proposals concerning the work programme of the Commission on Sustainable Development after 1997 contained in the report of the Secretary-General on overall progress achieved since Rio.[a] The new work programme would subject a limited number of thematic areas to in-depth consideration, highlighting the linkages with relevant chapters of Agenda 21 and the role of relevant economic sectors and major groups. This approach would promote a new emphasis on cross-cutting issues such as production and consumption patterns, population, health, impacts on gender and children and means of implementation, including finance and technology transfer, capacity-building and education, which will be essential to the development of practical and integrated policies.

Operations at the regional level

6. Since the Conference new forms of inter-agency cooperation have emerged at the regional level. They include cooperation between the regional commissions and regional representatives of the global United Nations agencies and programmes. Examples are the adoption of the Regional Action Programme for Asia and the Pacific, the establishment by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, in cooperation with United Nations Environment Programme and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, of the Joint Committee on Environment and Development in the Arab Region and the upcoming memorandum of understanding between the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Bank on collaboration in water supply, environment and sanitation in Africa. Moreover, regional organizations outside the United Nations system have taken an active role in some regions in preparing regional plans and programmes to follow up on United Nations conferences and other international programme activities, and implementation of conventions. However, achieving a better balance between work at the global level and work at the regional level will be essential for success in the next stage of Agenda 21 implementation. In those areas of sustainable development where regional approaches may prove to be most promising, possibilities for entrusting the United Nations regional commission with a more active coordination role should also be explored.

7. It is necessary to intensify regional implementation of the three Rio conventions, namely, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change,

the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, particularly through undertaking initiatives aimed at linking activities and projects in the areas of drought and desertification, climate change, forests and biodiversity. Regional cooperation is also vital in implementing related conventions and the commitments stemming from the series of global conferences organized by the United Nations since 1990, all of which have incorporated the fundamental principles and policy goals of Agenda 21. Regional cooperation will continue to be of great importance in implementing regional environmental agreements.

Operations at the national level

8. It is recognized that institutional cooperation at the national level should be based on country needs and requirements and an appropriate enabling context. Where national sustainable development strategies exist, and national institutional arrangements promote an integrated approach, this facilitates inter-agency cooperation and partnership. Progress in these areas, however, has been slow. Organizations with mainly analytical or normative roles and no country representation have no direct access at the country level and few means of interaction with potential partners.

9. Improved country-level coordination is needed not only among the international and regional organizations but also, in particular, among the donor programmes and activities, which are sometimes carried out in isolation from relevant inter-agency activities and national coordination mechanisms. Such coordination is needed both for the implementation of Agenda 21 initiatives, and for effective follow-up among focal points dealing with the major environmental, social and developmental conventions. Country strategy notes, which were proposed as a basis for country-level coordination, have not yet emerged as a mechanism that can ensure effective interorganizational cooperation, and the resident coordinator system has not yet realized its full potential and needs further strengthening and commitment by the system as a whole.

REVIEW OF INTER-AGENCY COORDINATION*

The Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development and its task manager system

10. Almost immediately after the Rio Conference, the Administrative Committee on Coordination, taking into account provisions of Agenda 21, decided on an institutional framework for promoting a coherent system-wide response to

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* The Administrative Committee on Coordination undertook a review of the functioning of the Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development as part of its preparations for the special session of the General Assembly. A summary of the results of the review exercise is given in this section of the statement.

Conference follow-up requirements. That framework was built on an innovative model that combined central coordination functions, vested in the mandates of the Administrative Committee on Coordination and the newly established Inter-Agency Committee on Sustainable Development, and decentralized allocation of specific responsibilities to relevant organizations of the United Nations system, based on their comparative strengths, to act as task managers for various programme components of Agenda 21.

11. As more experience has been gained in the implementation of Agenda 21 and in the work of the Commission on Sustainable Development, modalities for inter-agency collaboration have evolved considerably. The Inter-Agency Committee has gained in importance as an umbrella for coordination initiatives, which at the same time give full rein to numerous, more specialized inter-agency mechanisms. Experience shows that those mechanisms have worked best when taking a focused, thematic approach. That permits them to draw more deeply on each agency's expertise and resources and promotes detailed, technical collaboration related to data and information, policy and practice, or operational programmes. This has to be taken fully into account in future work, which includes improving the effectiveness of the Administrative Committee on Coordination's subcommittees on freshwater and on oceans and coastal areas; the latter subcommittee was called for by the Commission on Sustainable Development.

12. System-wide work aimed at further broadening and deepening existing inter-agency collaboration and coordination in follow-up to the Rio Conference has become an ongoing process in the United Nations system. It includes continuing consideration of measures aimed at improving the delivery capacity and coordination at the field level, enhancing policy coordination at the global, regional and country levels, better interaction between the Inter-Agency Committee and other bodies and mechanisms of the Administrative Committee on Coordination for inter-agency coordination, streamlining requests for reporting, and involvement of organizations outside the United Nations system, among others.

13. The task manager system should continue to promote greater interaction with other inter-agency arrangements, including those established to follow up other recent United Nations conferences. It has furthered outreach beyond the framework of the United Nations system, with a view to involving other relevant intergovernmental organizations and processes, as well as partners from major groups and the non-governmental organizations.

14. Task managers should continue to expand their efforts to involve major groups more widely in consultations regarding the preparation of reports for the Commission and implementation of sustainable development activities and, when appropriate, to invite experts from major groups to participate in inter-agency expert meetings.

15. In the view of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, these evolving arrangements have generally allowed the United Nations system to provide a flexible, collaborative and participatory mechanism to support the implementation of Agenda 21 and coordination of various sustainable development

activities. Successful examples of system-wide collaboration, particularly at the programme/country levels, include the Interorganizational Programme on the Sound Management of Chemicals, established as an inter-agency partnership arrangement in support of the Intergovernmental Forum on Chemical Safety; the informal Inter-Agency Task Force on Forests, established to respond to the needs of the Ad Hoc Intergovernmental Panel on Forests; and cooperation in the context of the Commission's programme on indicators for sustainable development. Several cooperative inter-agency programmes which preceded the Conference, particularly in the area of science, information and analysis, have now been linked to the Inter-Agency Committee through its task manager system, such as the World Climate Programme.

16. The Administrative Committee on Coordination believes that the task manager system of the Inter-Agency Committee has generally led to more effective use of resources and expertise within the United Nations system and is a promising improvement over previous efforts at inter-agency cooperation and joint action. It has rationalized the preparation of reports for the Commission and facilitated contributions among organizations based on their specialized mandates. By encouraging systematic communication and information exchange, it has helped disseminate knowledge of means to promote sustainable development and reduced duplication of effort.

17. Nevertheless, it is the view of the Administrative Committee on Coordination that the task manager system has not yet realized its full potential in fostering coordination among all the agencies. The review of the functioning of the Inter-Agency Committee conducted by the Administrative Committee on Coordination led to the conclusion that a better balance is needed in coordination at global, regional and country/field levels. Cooperation remains underdeveloped at the regional level - although in some instances, such as in the region of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, agencies have been designated as coordinators for specific programme areas of the regional action programme.

18. Further specification of task manager roles will be necessary, to distinguish between ongoing data and information functions, for example, and cooperation at regional or national levels on programme delivery. Task managers should be encouraged to promote joint programming at the regional and subregional levels, and to foster a more integrated approach which incorporates the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development.

Resource Issues

19. Inter-agency coordination entails both benefits and costs. Its goal is to combine the expert skills and financial resources of individual agencies so that policies, information resources, and operational programmes better integrate specific sustainable development concerns. Moreover, resources may be deployed more cost-effectively when agencies collaborate in a mutually reinforcing manner, or when they accept a division of labour which avoids programme duplication. Yet consultations and networking among specialists in different fields take time, and, in spite of the fact that modern communications

technology can facilitate and expedite communications, face-to-face interactions remain essential in generating responsiveness and improving results. Meetings require staff time for preparing discussion papers and reports, as well as travel expenses.

20. The task manager system therefore has its costs. System-wide reporting responsibilities have placed a considerable strain on individual organizations, as they have been borne within existing human and financial resources. It has been difficult financially to keep up representation in the Commission, the Inter-Agency Committee and Agenda 21-related meetings and with those relevant to the agency's mandate. Further operationalization of new political agreements reached at the intergovernmental level and moving towards joint programming would give rise to additional demands.

21. The financial crisis affecting the United Nations and many of the specialized agencies and programmes leaves little room for innovative and more cooperative initiatives by individual agencies or throughout the system. The expectations raised by the Rio Conference of an increase in available resources have not been met, while the activities that had to be carried out have expanded considerably. The organizations and agencies of the United Nations system are therefore hard-pressed to carry out both their original mandates and those stemming from the Conference and the work requirements of the Commission. At the same time, as changes in programmes and procedures yield appreciable improvements, they offer new opportunities and invite further commitments and requests on the part of Member States.

22. Joint programming, directly involving a limited number of the most concerned agencies, needs to be further fostered. Policy integration and the need for coordinated action are the central messages of Agenda 21. However, it is becoming urgently apparent that efforts to promote integrated approaches to coordination at policy-making and programme implementation levels are not matched by coordinated funding mechanisms. United Nations agencies involved in joint programmes are generally required to seek funding from their own funding bodies, with adverse effects on resource efficiency. In this context, efforts should be increased to enhance the effectiveness of cooperation between various agencies of the United Nations system with international financial institutions, including those outside the United Nations system such as regional development banks. There is, moreover, a need for further development of joint funding arrangements, so that joint funding proposals can be presented for more effective consideration by appropriate funding institutions and mechanisms.

Notes

* E/CN.17/1997/2.

ANNEX IV

Statement by the Administrative Committee on Coordination on staff security

1. The organizations of the United Nations system are now working closer to the front lines of conflict or even inside conflict zones, as well as in volatile and politically complex situations. This is reflected in the casualties that the United Nations system has suffered in the last year.

2. Under these circumstances, there is an urgent need for the United Nations system and the international community to consider at what point an area or a situation has become so dangerous that United Nations system staff must be withdrawn.

3. The Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Security Meeting held in Rome on 6 and 8 May 1997 discussed and made recommendations on a wide range of issues relating to the security and safety of staff (see ACC/1997/10). ACC fully supports the recommendations of the Meeting, and wishes to highlight a number of issues which are of immediate concern to the safety and security of staff in crisis situations and which need to be jointly addressed by the United Nations system under the auspices of the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator, as follows:

(a) Security of national staff: in conflict areas in which United Nations system staff are called upon to operate, it is frequently the national staff that bear the brunt of any resentment or hostility towards the United Nations. Accordingly, the national staff, citizens of the country are frequently the first victims of retaliation; this is even more true if an evacuation of international staff is being considered or has occurred;

(b) Urgent action is required to ensure that all appropriate measures are taken to assist these staff;

(c) Coordination with peacekeeping and other field missions: frequently, United Nations system staff find themselves working alongside United Nations military and other field missions. The United Nations system needs to enhance formal mechanisms whereby all the agencies, programmes and funds can cooperate to pursue their respective objectives and mandates in coordination with each other;

(d) Training: the training package currently in use in the system has been successfully field tested over the past several years. It is under continuous review. This training package needs to be disseminated with all possible speed, in particular to managers in the field, and the necessary funds for this need to be made readily available;

(e) Stress: as a result of the functions entrusted to them, United Nations staff are subjected to increasing levels of stress. The United Nations system needs a comprehensive programme of stress relief, including training, counselling and debriefing. It is imperative that the associated administrative and financial resources be made available to implement this programme;

(f) Recognizing that the implementation of security measures will entail additional resources, ACC members will continue to give priority attention to the financing of all necessary measures to enhance staff security;

(g) ACC welcomes recent statements made by legislative bodies, including the presidential statement of 21 May 1997 of the Security Council, especially as these referred to:

(i) The planned establishment of an international criminal court, in which the Council reminds all States and others concerned of the need to bring to justice those who violate international humanitarian law;

(ii) The Convention on the Safety of the United Nations and Associated Personnel, in which the Council calls upon all parties concerned to ensure the safety and security of these personnel, as well as of personnel of humanitarian organizations.

4. ACC intends to follow with keen interest the implementation of the statements mentioned in paragraph 3 (g) above.

ANNEX V

Statement by the Administrative Committee on Coordination on conditions of service and the application of the Noblemaire principle

The Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) adopted the following statement for submission to the General Assembly:

"In recent years, ACC has repeatedly called upon the General Assembly and the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC) to restore the competitiveness of United Nations common system remuneration. In a statement submitted to the General Assembly in 1996 (A/C.5/51/25 and Corr.1, annex) ACC stressed the importance of there being simultaneous movement on two fronts: the active, continuing pursuit of efficiency, enhanced performance, including managerial performance, and structural and management reform; and an equally active pursuit by ICSC of the measures required to restore competitive conditions of service through the rebuilding of the Noblemaire principle. Both of these objectives are part of the established policy of the General Assembly. They both must be pursued vigorously and in a mutually reinforcing way.

"In the same statement, ACC stressed that the grave financial situation that the system was facing remained of the utmost concern to the executive heads, and that the search for solutions to the financial crisis must be given the utmost priority by the membership. In the statement, ACC recalled that, at the level of the secretariats, no efforts were being spared towards improved management, as well as cost containment, in the face of long-standing budgetary constraints. It emphasized that two key conditions for the ultimate success of those efforts would be flexibility and innovation in staff management, and the capacity to attract, motivate and retain the best performers, so as to continue to adhere to the tenets of the Charter of the United Nations with regard to the international civil service.

"In the statement, members of ACC also reiterated their responsibility for the management of the cost structure of their organizations, as stated in the ACC submission on the subject to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session (A/C.5/50/11). In the same context, they noted that modalities and arrangements for implementation may need to vary from organization to organization, in consultation, as necessary, with the respective governing bodies, taking into account resource constraints while fully safeguarding programme resources.

"In the past two years, the General Assembly has also reaffirmed the need to ensure the competitiveness of the United Nations system conditions of service.

"Although ACC would have preferred a broader base for pay setting, the General Assembly has also repeatedly reaffirmed the current interpretation of the Noblemaire principle as the basis for the determination of common

system remuneration at the Professional and higher levels (i.e. that United Nations common system remuneration should be based on the compensation levels of the highest paying national civil service).

"Arising out of its study of the application of the Noblemaire principle, ICSC reported to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session* that, on the basis of a technical evaluation conducted in accordance with the approved methodology, the total compensation levels of the German federal civil service were superior to those of the current comparator - the United States federal civil service.

"United Nations remuneration is, however, still being determined against that of the United States federal civil service. Hence, the Noblemaire principle is no longer being applied.

"In its resolution 51/216 of 18 December 1996, the General Assembly decided to reconsider the question of the comparator civil service at its fifty-second session.

"Acknowledging the complexity of changing from a comparator whose remuneration and classification structures are similar to those of the United Nations and the added complications, inter alia, for pensions, ACC proposes that the margin be used as the mechanism by which the Noblemaire principle may be effectively applied. Thus, ICSC's technical findings would be appropriately recognized.

"Given that the gap between the remuneration levels of the German and the United States federal civil services currently is some 11 per cent, ACC requests the General Assembly to revise the margin from its current range of 110-120 to that of 120-130. It would also request the General Assembly to invite ICSC to make proposals, at the latest to its fifty-third session in 1998, as to an appropriate adjustment in order to bring the United Nations common system remuneration within the revised margin range of 120-130."

Notes

* Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 30, addendum (A/50/30/Add.1), para. 47 (a).